

MODALITY IN THARU: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

KRISHNA PRASAD PAUDYAL

Department of English, Birendra Multiple Campus (TU), Bharatpur, Chitwan, Nepal

ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the morphosyntactic structures characterizing the notion of modality in two different Tharu languages: Dangaura and Chitoniya, from a comparative perspective. Being the members of the same language family, both of these languages share the vector verbs *sak* used to express the notions of possibility, ability and permission, and *par* expressing that of necessity and obligation, though there are other verbs like *chai/cahī* to indicate necessity and *pa* for the notion of permission. However, they exhibit completely different system in the selection and distribution of devices to express the secondhand knowledge about which the speaker is not sure. Besides, they have a distinct agreement system of their own.*

KEYWORDS: *Possibility, Ability, Permission, Obligation, Necessity and Hearsay*

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Tharu, the largest indigenous community of the nation, is one of the components of the multi-ethnicity in Nepal. Although the population of the Tharu in Nepal is reported to be 1, 737, 470, only 1, 529, 875 of them speak this language (CBS 2012:4, 144). The ethnonym 'Tharu' stands for the ethnic group and the language they speak. As the habitat of this ethnic group extends from Mechi to Mahakali, a considerable variation is attested in their language and culture. Based on the differences observed in the linguistic and cultural practices, this ethnic group along with their language has been broadly classified into four varieties: Rana, Dangaura, Chitoniya, and Kochila. Tharu have been spoken in different Terai and inner Terai districts of Nepal (Paudyal 2014:7-8). The principal concern of this paper is to examine the morphosyntactic structures used to express Modality, a grammatical category, in Chitoniya and Dangaura Tharu languages from a comparative perspective.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This paper is basically a descriptive presentation of the two Tharu languages from a comparative perspective. The data for Dangaura Tharu were taken from the selected Tharu communities in the Tulasipur municipality of Dang district, whereas the data for Chitoniya Tharu were collected from Ratnanagar and Khairahani Municipalities, and Gardi VDC of Chitwan district. The collected data, mainly the recorded texts, were transcribed with the help of Audacity, and made an entry in the Toolbox, where the natural texts were translated and interlinearized. The natural texts were glossed and broken into morphemes following the Leipzig glossing rules. The grammatical description has been supported with the examples presented as the interlinearized text with four lines: first the text, second the morpheme breaks, third glosses in English and fourth free translations. The figures at the end of the examples indicate the references of the corpus.

3.0 MODALITY

Modality is a grammatical category used to indicate the speaker's attitude. According to Givón (2001a:300), the speaker's attitude is based on Epistemic judgment, which is concerned with truth, probability, certainty, belief, and evidence, and Evaluative (deontic) judgment concerned with desirability, preference, intent, ability, and obligation. For Watters (2002:285) modality "includes the kinds of notions translated by the words like 'can', 'must' and 'should'" in English". Modality is expressed morphologically, syntactically or by using modal verbs or separate particles or simply intonation in different languages (Bybee and Fleischman 1995:2; Palmer 1985:18). However, modality in both of these Tharu varieties- Chitoniya and Dangaura Tharu- is realized in the form of modal verbs and, sometimes, in the use of separate particles. This paper makes a comparative study of the grammatical structures used to express the modalities such as possibility, permission, ability, necessity and obligation in these Tharu languages.

3.1 Possibility

The notion of modality in both of these Tharu languages is primarily expressed through the modal verbs used as vector verbs in complex predicates. The vector verb used to embody the notion of possibility in both of these languages is approximately the same: *sek/syak* in Dangaura and *sak* 'be able to' in Chitoniya Tharu.¹ It is the modal verb that carries the tense and agreement markers in both of these languages, as exemplified in (1a-d).

- (1) a. *panik b^{hi}ɽ ɽa kãɽ hui syak^ha* (Dangaura)
 pani -k b^{hi}ɽɽ ɽa kãɽ hui sek -ɽ^h -a
 water -GEN in PRT thorn be can -PRS -3SG.NH
 'There may be thorns in the water.' (FR_YRC.054)
- b. *ɽ^hawa killa hui seki* (Dangaura)
 ɽ^hawa killa hui sek -i
 or nail be can -3SG.NH
 'Or there may be nails.' (FR_YRC.055)
- c. *yi bilukawa b^{hi}ɽara hak^he sakbiya*
 yi bilukawa b^{hi}ɽara hak^h -e sak -b -iya
 this hole in be.PRS -INF can -FUT -3SG
 'It might be in this hole.' (FS_DR&RM.083)
- d. *kat^{hi} hak^he saktayi jani marad ki?*
 kat^{hi} hak^h -e sak -t -ayi jani marad ki
 what be.PRS -INF can -FUT -3PL wife husband or
 'What might have been (the relationship between them), husband and wife?' (FS_DR&RM.196)

¹ Typologically, *sak* is the common vector verb used to express possibility in most of the Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi, Nepali, Bhojpuri, and Maithili. *aj waris ho sakti he* (Hindi) *aja pani parna sak^ha* (Nepali) 'It may rain today.'

The modal verbs *syaktʰa* ‘can -PRS -3SG.NH’ (1a), *seki* ‘can -3SG.NH’ (1b), *sakbiya* ‘can -FUT -3SG’ (1c) and *saktayi* ‘can -FUT -3PL’ (1d) express possibility of the actions expressed by the lexical verbs in respective examples.

3.2 Permission

In both of these Tharu languages, the explicators *pa* ‘be allowed to’ and *sak/ syak/ sek/* ‘be able to’ are commonly used to express the notion of permission. These explicators are preceded by the base or purposive form of the content verbs. The vector verbs are used to carry the modal function and the agreement markers, as illustrated in (2a-d).

- (2) a. *yi jaŋgaɭma sakkujaɭa gʰās kaɭ pa paɪʰaɳ* (Dangaura)
 yi jaŋgaɭ -ma sakku -jaɭa gʰās kaɭ -a pa -tʰ -aɳ
 this forest -LOC all -NCLF grass cut -PURP be allowed to -PRS -PL
 ‘Everyone is allowed to mow in this jungle.’ (ELCTD_ PG.458)
- b. *ab tʰaɪ kʰyala sekbya* (Dangaura)
 ab tʰaɪ kʰel -a sek -b -ya
 now 2SG.NH play -PURP can -FUT -2SG.NH
 ‘Now you can play.’ (ELCTD_ PG.456)
- c. *bina rahadani se wahawā haine jaye pawayi* (Chitoniya)
 bina rahadani -se wahawā haine ja -e pa -yi
 without passport -ABL there NEG go -INF get -PST.HAB
 ‘No one was allowed to go there without a passport.’ (PLS.JRC-70.194)
- d. *yi kamawā worake tohara gʰar ja sakbaha* (Chitoniya)
 yi kamawā wora -ke tohara gʰar ja sak -b -ha
 this work finish -SEQ 2SG.PL house go can -FUT -2PL
 ‘You can go home after finishing this work.’ (ELCTD_BM.281)

In these examples, the vector verbs *paɪʰaɳ* (2a), *sekbya* (2b), *pawayi* (2c), and *sakbaha* (2d) express the notion of permission. They carry the concord markers and are preceded by the infinitival, purposive or base forms of the main verbs *kaɭa* ‘cut -PURP’, *kʰyala* ‘play -PURP’, *jaye* ‘go -INF’, and *ja* ‘go’ respectively.

3.3 Ability

The explicator *sak* ‘be able to’ is a most productive vector verb in many of the Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi, Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri and all the Tharu varieties. It can function as a device to express possibility, permission and physical or mental ability. In Chitoniya Tharu we find the basic form that is used in most of IA languages, but in Dangaura Tharu it gets simple morphophonemic modifications and becomes *sek* or *syak*. In this case also, it is preceded by the purposive, infinitival or base form of the content verb, as demonstrated in (3a-d).

- (3) a. *kaisin baɭ kara sekbo?* (Dangaura)

- kʌisin baʈ kʌr -ʌ sek -b -o
 how talk do -PURP be able to -FUT -2PL.MH
 ‘How will you be able to talk (to her)?’ (FR_MRC.175)
- b. *apna sekbi ki naĩ kara kam?* (Dangaura)
 apna sek -b -i ki naĩ kʌr -ʌ kam
 2SG.HON be able to -FUT -2H or NEG do -INF work
 ‘Can you do the work or not?’ (FR_MRC.196)
- c. *pac^{he} kʌhʌyi ‘baba nahĩ sakbasu paḍ^{he}’* (Chitoniya)
 pac^{he} kʌh -yi baba nahĩ sak -b -su paḍ^h -e
 later say -PROG father NEG can -FUT -1SG read -INF
 ‘Later he said, ‘father, I can’t study.’ (PLS.JRC-70.109)
- d. *kunō haine saklayi girawe* (Chitoniya)
 kunō haine sak -l -ʌyi gir -a -e
 any NEG can -PST -3PL fall -CAUS -INF
 ‘None of them could make it (the target) fall.’ (JF.BM-78.0202)

Both types of abilities are expressed in these examples. The modal *sek* or *sak* expresses the notion of mental ability in (3a) and (3c) and physical ability in (3b) and (3d).

3.4 Necessity

Epistemic necessity in both of these Tharu languages is realized in the form of a vector verb *par* which can be preceded by an infinitival or participial form of the content verb.² Necessity can also be expressed through the use of a verb *cahi* (Dangaura) and *cahĩ* (Chitoniya) ‘is needed’ but it is mostly preceded by a participial or infinitival form of the content verb or an NP. The examples in (4a-d) clarify the case.

- (4) a. *ʈʌ u p^hula g^hʌlai pari* (Dangaura)
 ʈʌ u p^hula g^hʌl -a -i paɾ -i
 PRT that flower wear -CAUS -NMLZ have to -3SG.NH
 ‘(You) have to put that flower upon me.’ (FR_MRC.100)
- b. *ũhan cahi kalase mai baloim* (Dangaura)
 ʈur^hʌ -hʌna cahi kalase mai bʌla -m
 2PL -DAT need if 1SG call -1SG.FUT

² The vector verb *par* ‘is needed to’ is also a common verb in many of the Indo-Aryan languages. In Nepali, it is simply *par* but in Hindi it becomes *paḍ*, as *timile yo kam garnu par^{ca}* (Nepali) *tum^hẽ ye kam karna paḍega* (Hindi) ‘You will have to do this work’.

- ‘If I need you I will call you.’ (FR_MRC.123)
- c. *are yawΛ dewΛ, boke nahĩ parΛyi* (Chitoniya)
- are ya -Λ de -Λ bok -e nahĩ par -t -Λyi
- VOC come -INF give -IMP carry -INF NEG have to -FUT -3PL
- ‘Let him come. We will not have to carry him (on our back).’ (JF.BM-78.0111)
- d. *mor p^hΛl cahĩ* (Chitoniya)
- mor p^hΛl cahĩ
- 1SG.GEN fruit need
- ‘I need fruits.’ (JF.BM-78.0323)

3.5 Obligation

The vector verb *par* also embodies a denotes obligation in both of these Tharu languages. Even in this case, it is preceded by the infinitival or purposive form of the content verb. As usual, the inflectional suffixes are affixed to the vector verb *par*, as illustrated in (5a-b).

- (5) a. *nahĩ bΛtohi par^ha* (Dangaura)
- nahĩ bΛta -hi par -t^h -a
- NEG tell -EMPH have to -PRS -3SG.NH
- ‘No, you must tell.’ (FR_YRC.091)
- b. *jaye parΛyi, behan b^heΛyi* (Chitoniya)
- ja -e par -l -Λyi behan b^he -l -Λyi
- go -INF have to -PST -3PL morning become -PST -3PL
- ‘It has become morning, I must go now.’ (JOW.BRM-56.019)

Here we can notice that both the notions of epistemic necessity and deontic obligation are encoded in the same morphological structure in both of these Tharu languages, though necessity can also be embodied in the form of *cahi* or *cahĩ* in Dangaura and Chitoniya Tharu respectively.

3.6 Hearsay

The modality of Hearsay refers to the way how the notion of second hand knowledge is expressed. Both of these Tharu languages embody this notion differently. Dangaura Tharu realizes the notion with a particle *hũ* ‘it is said’, whereas a distinct lexical item *sunte* ‘it is heard’ is used in Chitoniya Tharu for the purpose. They are also different from the distribution of these devices: the particle *hũ* always concludes the sentence, whereas *sunte* generally introduces one. However, there are evidences in our corpus where it is distributed differently. We have plenty of such expressions as it is so frequently used in narrative discourses. The examples in (6a-d) illustrate the situations.

- (6) a. *ektʰo rʌjwa rʌhʌ hũ* (Dangaura)
 ek -tʰo rʌjwa rʌh -ʌ hũ
 one -NCLF king remain -3SG.NH HRS
 ‘It is said that there was a king.’ (FR_MRC.006)
- b. *hũkahar sʌkku bʰuʈla swanʌk rʌhʌli hũ*
 hũkahar sʌkku bʰuʈla swan -ʌk rʌh -l -i hũ
 3SG.GEN all hair gold -GEN live -PST -3SG.NH HRS
 ‘Her hair was all made up of gold.’ (SR_PRC.010)
- c. *sunte bʰag lʌcʰmika jʰʌgʌʈa bʌʈʌu lagʌʌ*
 sun -te bʰag lʌcʰmi -kʌ jʰʌgʌʈa bʌʈ -ʌu lag -ʌʌ
 hear -HRS Bhagya Laxmi -GEN quarrel be.PRS -3PL start -PTCP
 ‘It is heard that there is a quarrel between Bhagya and Laxmi.’ (BL_FM-79.023)
- d. *ʌre bʌbuwa tũ sunte mor beʈiya se byahʌ kʌrʌ -yi kʰoj -yi* (Chitoniya)
 ʌre bʌbuwa tũ sunte mor beʈiya -se
 VOC baby 2SG.NH HRS 1SG.GEN daughter -INS
 byahʌ kʌr -yi kʰoj -yi
 marriage do -PROG search -PROG
 ‘Hey baby, I hear that you want to marry my daughter.’ (BL_FM-79.089)

The use of *hũ* and *sunte* in these examples indicate that speakers are not sure about the propositions they are going to make. They are saying so based on what they have heard. This feature is used to distinguish the firsthand knowledge of the second hand information.

4.0 SUMMARY

As both of these Tharu languages belong to the same- Indo-Aryan- language family, there are many lexical and grammatical similarities, especially in the use of vector verbs to express different modalities. We have noticed that not only in these Tharu languages, but also in many of the Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi, Nepali, Bhojpuri, Maithili, the notion of possibility, permission, and ability are embodied with the same vector verb *sʌk* ‘be able to’, and that of necessity and obligation are characterized in the form of *pʌr* ‘is needed’. In both of these languages the concord markers are carried by the vector verbs which are attached to the infinitive, purposive, or base form of the content verbs. However, in the case of Hearsay, they are completely different in the selection and distribution of the devices: a particle *hũ*, which is distributed at the sentence final position, is attested in Dangaura, whereas Chitoniya Tharu characterizes a lexical item *sunte*, which is distributed at the sentence initial position. Although we find some similarities in lexical items, they are completely different in the grammatical systems like person, gender, and agreement.

ABBREVIATIONS

~	nasalization	1	First person	2	Second person
3	Third person	ABL	Ablative	ACC	Accusative
CAUS	Causative	COND	Conditional	DAT	Dative
EMPH	Emphatic	FUT	Future	HRS	Hearsay
Hon-	Honorific	HORT	Hortative	GEN	Genitive
IMP	Imperative	INF	Infinitive	LOC	Locative
NEG	Negative	NH	Non-honorific	NCLF	Numeral classifier
NMLZ	Nominalizer	OBL	Oblique	PRT	Particle
PL	Plural	PRF	Perfect	PRS	Present
PROG	Progressive	PST	Past	PST.HAB	Past habit
PTCP	Participial	REFL	Reflexive	SEQ	Sequential
SG	Singular	VOC	Vocative		

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